

Penn Jones, JFK theorist, editor

BY BARRY SHLACHTER

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

William Penn Jones Jr., a feisty Midlothian newspaper editor and among the earliest Kennedy assassination theorists, died Sunday at an Alvarado nursing home after suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He was 83.

"He was a crusty, no-nonsense guy," said Gary Mack, archivist of The Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas who in the early 1980s co-edited a JFK newsletter Mr. Penn founded, *The Continuing Inquiry*. "He was direct. His language was very colorful in a typical Texas way. He seemed fearless."

Aside from the newsletter, Mr. Jones self-published a four-volume work on the assassination, *Forgive My Grief*.

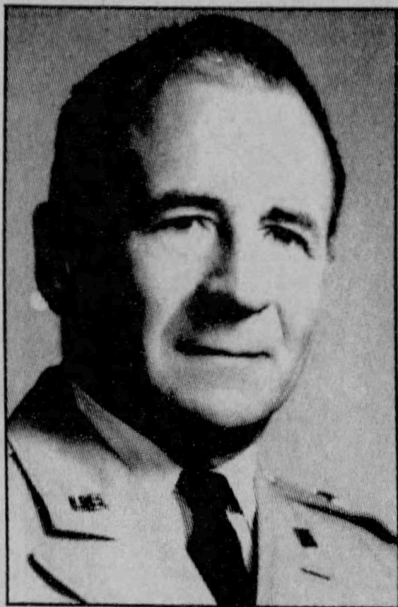
Mr. Jones received notoriety for his early questioning of the Warren Commission's report and for suggesting that about 150 people connected with President Kennedy's assassination died under mysterious circumstances. Only years later did mainstream researchers discount his assertions.

As a liberal editor in a conservative community, Mr. Jones became embroiled in a 1962 dispute with Midlothian school administrators over their refusal to invite speakers to rebut talks given by members of the right-wing John Birch Society.

When the *Midlothian Mirror* office was firebombed soon after, many residents assumed it stemmed from Mr. Jones' outspoken position. As a result, he was given the Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award for courageous journalism, said Dallas author Hugh Aynsworth, who was among those who nominated Mr. Jones.

However, it was later determined that a mentally ill 19-year-old, not one of Mr. Jones' political enemies, torched the office, Aynsworth said.

The son of sharecroppers, Mr. Jones was born Oct. 14, 1914, in the northeastern Texas town of Annona. He rode the rails with hobos during the Depression and then



William Penn Jones Jr. published his early Kennedy assassination theories.

worked his way through the University of Texas at Austin by washing dishes and picking black-eyed peas, said his second wife, Elaine K. Jones.

Mr. Jones was a member of the Army Reserve when World War II broke out, and served in the European theater, rising to the rank of captain. On his retirement from the reserves in 1974, he was promoted to brigadier general, his widow said.

In 1946, he purchased the *Mirror* for \$4,000, and by the early 1960s had made a town full of enemies, he told an interviewer in 1962. When the paper was hit by the homemade incendiary, Mr. Jones said, "Lots of people walked away from my shop yesterday and they didn't say they were sorry."

Before integration, he argued in favor of improving the town's black school.

His first marriage ended in divorce in 1981.

Aside from his widow, Mr. Jones is survived by two sons, Penn Jones III of Fort Worth and Michael Jones of Dallas; and two grandchildren, Melis Jones and Nedgie Jones, both of Irving.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated on Saturday at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Waxahachie after cremation. His ashes will be buried on the grounds of his Boyce farm, his family said.

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